# Proposed Language for SSMP Goals, Objectives, and Milestones

**I. Salton Sea Management Program Goal** [Source: http://resources.ca.gov/salton-sea/]

The goal of the Salton Sea Management Program (SSMP) is to maximize bird and fish habitat and minimize fine-particle air pollution at and around the Salton Sea.

**II. SSMP Objectives** [Source: http://resources.ca.gov/salton-sea/task-force/]

- Begin immediate implementation and further development of Salton Sea management plan
- Improve public outreach and local partnership
- Accelerate project implementation and delivery
- Meet a short-term goal of 9,000-12,000 acres of habitat creation and dust suppression projects at the sea, [the 10/9/2015 press release at https://www.gov.ca.gov/news.php?id=19161 states this as "Restoring up to 12,000 acres of shoreline habitat over the next five years"]
- Set medium-term goal of 18,000-25,000 acres of habitat creation and dust suppression projects at the sea [the 10/9/2015 press release at https://www.gov.ca.gov/news.php?id=19161 states this as "Restoring up to 25,000 acres of additional exposed shoreline starting in 2020"]
- Lay the foundation for a long-term Salton Sea management framework.
- Ensure Oversight by Regulatory Agencies
- Consider opportunities for increasing renewable energy development at and around the Salton Sea

"The California Water Action Plan (January 2014) calls for protection and restoration of key ecosystems, including the Salton Sea. The California Water Action Plan provides that the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA), in partnership with the Salton Sea Authority, will coordinate state, local and federal restoration efforts and work with local stakeholders to develop a shared vision for the future of the Salton Sea. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the California Department of Water Resources are immediately to begin implementing the first phase of this effort with the construction of 600 acres of near shore aquatic habitat to provide feeding, nesting and breeding habitat for birds." [Source: SWRCB ORDER WR 2017-0134.]

**III. SSMP Milestones** [Source: SWRCB ORDER WR 2017-0134.]

"24. Consistent with Recitals B, C, and D [of this Order], in addition to currently planned and funded habitat projects (Red Hill Bay, Torres Martinez wetlands and Species Conservation Habitat) and all QSA JPA funded Salton Sea mitigation projects, restoration milestones detailed below are necessary to address public health and environmental concerns during Phase 1 of the SSMP. Additional projects and milestones will be developed for subsequent phases to address public health and environmental concerns.

a. By December 31, 2018, construction of habitat and dust-suppression projects shall be completed on 500 acres of exposed playa.

b. By December 31, 2019, construction of habitat and dust-suppression projects shall be completed on an additional 1,300 acres of exposed playa.

c. By December 31, 2020, construction of habitat and dust-suppression projects shall be completed on an additional 1,700 acres of exposed playa.

d. By December 31, 2021, construction of habitat and dust-suppression projects shall be completed on an additional 3,500 acres of exposed playa.

e. By December 31, 2022, construction of habitat and dust-suppression projects shall be completed on an additional 1,750 acres of exposed playa.

f. By December 31, 2023, construction of habitat and dust-suppression projects shall be completed on an additional 2,750 acres of exposed playa.

g. By December 31, 2024, construction of habitat and dust-suppression projects shall be completed on an additional 2,700 acres of exposed playa.

h. By December 31, 2025, construction of habitat and dust-suppression projects shall be completed on an additional 3,400 acres of exposed playa.

i. By December 31, 2026, construction of habitat and dust-suppression projects shall be completed on an additional 4,000 acres of exposed playa.

j. By December 31, 2027, construction of habitat and dust-suppression projects shall be completed on an additional 4,000 acres of exposed playa.

k. By December 31, 2028, construction of habitat and dust-suppression projects shall be completed on an additional 4,200 acres of exposed playa.

"25. No less than 50% of the acreage described in condition 24 shall provide habitat benefits for fish and wildlife that depend on the Salton Sea ecosystem. Projects that provide habitat benefits for fish and wildlife do not include dust control projects that involve surface roughening, vegetation enhancement and surface stabilization." [Source: SWRCB ORDER WR 2017-0134.]

**IV. Phase I 10-Year Plan** [place in Introduction]

The intent of the SSMP Phase I 10-Year Plan is to direct the State of California's efforts at the Salton Sea to protect fish and wildlife resources, develop shoreline and aquatic habitats, suppress dust from exposed playa, and obtain necessary funding. Additionally, this Phase I Plan demonstrates the state's commitment to meeting its long-term mitigation and restoration obligations at the Salton Sea through the end of the Quantification Settlement Agreement, and lays the foundation for subsequent Salton Sea activities. This Phase I Plan describes the objectives and sequencing of 29,800 acres of proposed habitat and dust control projects through the year 2028, and the implementation of the water backbone infrastructure necessary to deliver water to these projects. (Source: revised work plan language)

**V. Purpose and Need** [Source: 2006 draft PEIR Executive Summary]

"The Salton Sea ecosystem is an extremely valuable resource for resident and migratory birds, including a large number of threatened, endangered, and species of concern. Until [about 2003], the Salton Sea also supported a robust marine sport fishery. Increasing salinity and declining water quality have eliminated the marine fish species, and, with inflows that will be diminishing in the future, threaten the continued ability of the Salton Sea ecosystem to support birds and other wildlife. In recognition of the importance of the Salton Sea ecosystem, the state Legislature established a state policy [CA Fish & Game Code §2930 *et seq*.] for restoring the Salton Sea and permanently protecting the fish and wildlife resources dependent upon it." (2006 draft PEIR Executive Summary, p. ES-1.)

"Since the Salton Sea was created by a levee break along the Colorado River in 1905, it has supported a dynamic fishery and currently is an extremely important area for ~~numerous~~ [more than 400] avian

species. However, the Salton Sea is continually changing due to the lack of a natural outlet, evaporation, and the quality of inflows. By 2003, these effects had eliminated the marine sport fishery that was established in the 1950s, leaving only a remnant population of the very salt tolerant tilapia as the primary fish species. These changes now threaten the ability of the Salton Sea to continue to support fish, avian, and other wildlife species.

"The discussion of Salton Sea restoration cannot take place without recognizing the Quantification Settlement Agreement (QSA). The QSA was signed in 2003. It addresses water allocation issues between the holders of water rights to Colorado River water and enables California to stay within its 4.4 million acre-foot annual apportionment of Colorado River water. It also establishes a water transfer from agricultural water users to urban water users. During the first 15 years of the transfer, the Imperial Irrigation District (IID) is providing water to the Salton Sea to meet the inflow trajectory that would have occurred without the transfer. The inflow trajectory includes other activities in the watershed unrelated to the QSA that will result in declining water levels in the Salton Sea. After the first 15 years, this transfer will reduce agricultural return flows to the Salton Sea and accelerate progressive increases in salinity. This will decrease the time that the Salton Sea can continue to support fish, avian, and other wildlife species. The reduced agricultural return flows projected under the QSA will also reduce the physical size of the Salton Sea and expose lake bed sediments (playa) that, with the prevailing winds in this area, could exacerbate dust problems for an already degraded air basin.

"One of the conflicts identified during negotiations of the QSA was the extent of ecosystem mitigation and associated need for restoration within the Salton Sea watershed, and specifically for the Salton Sea. Recognizing these conflicts, the Legislature passed Salton Sea restoration legislation to facilitate environmental mitigation and allocate responsibility among water agencies involved in the QSA and the state. Salton Sea restoration legislation not only allowed the QSA to be executed, but also limited environmental mitigation responsibilities for IID, Coachella Valley Water District, and San Diego County Water Authority. The legislation establishes a cost limit on environmental mitigation requirements for the water agencies involved in the QSA. Under the legislation, any future state actions to restore important functions of the Salton Sea will be the sole responsibility of the state.

"The Salton Sea restoration legislation requires the Secretary for Resources to undertake a restoration study to determine a preferred alternative for the restoration of the Salton Sea ecosystem and the permanent protection of wildlife dependent on that ecosystem. The Salton Sea ecosystem is defined to include, but not be limited to, the Salton Sea, agricultural lands surrounding the Salton Sea, and the tributaries and drains within the Imperial and Coachella valleys that deliver water to the Salton Sea.

"The [goal of the SSMP] is to provide the maximum feasible attainment of the following objectives:

- Restoration of long term stable aquatic and shoreline habitat for the historic levels and diversity of fish and wildlife that depend on the Salton Sea;
- Elimination of air quality impacts from the restoration project; and
- Protection of water quality." (2006 draft PEIR Executive Summary, pp. ES1 – ES3.)

**VI. State's obligations to protect fish and wildlife.** [Sources: Fish & Game Code, WRO 2002-0013, MOU]

Section 2940 et seq. of the Fish and Game Code includes the following language:

"(f) In restoring the Salton Sea, it is the intent of the Legislature to do all of the following:

(1) Protect and provide long-term conservation of fish and wildlife that are dependent on the Salton Sea ecosystem.

(2) Restore the long-term stable aquatic and shoreline habitat for fish and wildlife that depend on the Salton Sea.

(3) Mitigate air quality impacts from restoration projects using the best available technology or best available control measures, as determined by the South Coast Air Quality Management District and the Imperial County Air Pollution Control District.

(4) Protect water quality.

(5) Maintain the Salton Sea as a vital link along the Pacific Flyway.

(6) Preserve local tribal heritage and cultural values associated with the Salton Sea.

(7) Minimize noxious odors and other water and air quality problems.

(8) Coordinate with local, state, and federal agencies that are responsible for air quality, endangered species, and other environmental mitigation implementation requirements of the Quantification Settlement Agreement.

(9) Enhance economic development opportunities that will provide sustainable financial improvements benefiting the local environment and the economic quality of life for communities around the Salton Sea."

The State Water Resources Control Board's Revised Order WRO 2002-0013 (p. 3) states

> this order achieves a reasonable balance between the State's interest in protecting the fish and wildlife that depend on the Salton Sea, the State's interest in protecting the economy of Imperial County, and the State's interest in the implementation of this transfer to meet California's water supply needs.

The August 2016 "Memorandum of Understanding By and Between the United States Department of the Interior and the California Natural Resources Agency Regarding the Coordination of Activities to Manage the Salton Sea" ("MOU") states that "[u]nder the [Quantification Settlement Agreement] the State of California agreed to assume responsibility for environmental mitigation requirements in excess of $133 million (in 2003 dollars), the amount that the QSA requires three local water agencies to pay for this purpose." MOU at p.2.

**VI. Habitat Goals and Objectives** [Source: primarily, 2006 draft PEIR Appendix H-1]

"The primary habitat goal for restoration is:

- Restore Salton Sea ecosystem and the permanent protection of the wildlife dependent on that ecosystem.

"Specific objectives include, to the maximum feasible extent, the following:

- Restore long term stable aquatic and shoreline habitat for the historic levels and diversity of fish and wildlife that depend on the Salton Sea;
- Promote habitat diversity by maintaining a mosaic of habitat types within and adjacent to the Salton Sea in an arrangement that enhances their value to fish and wildlife;
- Enhance the quality of habitat through improvements in water quality and water management;
- Promote the effective use of the available water resources to create habitats that provide for species diversity and abundance; and

- Incorporate flexibility in the facility and habitat designs to help accommodate adaptive management and the ability to respond to future changes in conditions and the status of individual fish and wildlife species (encourage solutions that rely on natural processes and minimize intensive, sustained interventions)." (2006 draft PEIR Appendix H-1, pp. H1-3 – H1-4.)

"[O]ne of the objectives is to maintain the historic diversity and levels of use at the Salton Sea, with an emphasis on the avian community. To maintain bird species richness, habitat at the Salton Sea following restoration must support the same functions that were supported at the Salton Sea in the recent past, such as invertebrate and fish production, nesting and roosting structures, undisturbed loafing areas, and shallow and open water foraging areas." (2006 draft PEIR Appendix H-1, p. H1-7.)

"The perimeter of the Salton Sea (wetted edge) to a depth of 3 feet effectively represents the area where forage resources can be captured by shorebirds. The area comprising habitat along the shoreline (0 to 3 feet in depth) is about 6,000 acres." (2006 draft PEIR Appendix H-1, p. H1-15.)

"Extending from the shallow shoreline, the vast majority of the area of the Salton Sea is occupied by open water that provides habitat for a variety of fish and wildlife. The distribution of fish and wildlife in the open water is concentrated along the near shore areas. Researchers identified the area extending a distance of about 1 kilometer (0.6 miles) from the shore as the area of greatest use by fish and birds. This area is used primarily by waterbirds, including those that feed on fish and invertebrates. The open water functions by providing area and substrate for fish and invertebrate production. Birds use open water for loafing, foraging, rafting, and as a staging area prior to migration. Open water also provides birds with protection from most predators and human disturbance." (2006 draft PEIR Appendix H-1, p. H1-16.)

"Five key habitat types are used by birds at the Salton Sea: playa; mudflats and shallow water; mid-depth water; deep water; and permanent vegetated wetlands. … Four factors appear to be strong drivers of bird use of Salton Sea habitat: amount of shallow water, sediment composition, amount of open water, and proximity to rivers and river mouths. (Jones et. al. 2016, p. ES-1.)

Table 3. Preferred habitat available at the Salton Sea, rounded to the nearest 100 acres.

| Type of Habitat | Preferred habitat, 1999 (acres) | | Preferred habitat, 2015 (acres) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Playa | 10,600 | | 12,200 | |
| Mudflats and shallow water | 26,100 | (12,000 - 65,100) | 28,000 | (13,600 - 65,700) |
| Mid-depth water | 18,900 | (7,800 – 41,000) | 19,900 | (8,100 - 43,400) |
| Deep water | 52,400 | (46,000 - 61,300) | 53,000 | (46,500 - 61,700) |
| Permanent vegetated wetlands | 2,500 | (500 - 7,800) | 3,100 | (700 - 8,600) |
| **Aggregate[1]** | **58,400** | **(51,000 - 73,200)** | **57,600** | **(50,200 - 72,500)** |

1. The aggregate is calculated as the combined footprint of all five types of habitat. Because some habitats overlap at the scale modeled, the aggregate is not equal to the sum of the five types of habitat.

(Jones et. al. 2016, p. 20.)

Jones, A., Krieger, K., Salas, L., Elliott, N., and Cooper, D. S. 2016. Quantifying bird habitat at the Salton Sea: Informing the State of California's Salton Sea Management Plan. Audubon California, Point Blue Conservation Science, and Cooper Ecological Monitoring, Inc.